



# REASONS OF EXCLUSION OF TRANSGENDER / KINNAR OR HIJRA IN EDUCATION: SELECT CASE STUDIES FROM DELHI

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## ABSTRACT

A detailed case study of two individuals belonging to the Kinnar and Hijra community was undertaken through open ended interviews to understand and document the reasons for their exclusion from Education. The findings clearly revealed that they fought against all odds to achieve what was their human right in the first place and battled all kinds and different manifestations of discrimination, marginalization and apathy from different quarters except for few individuals who did 'recognize' them as human beings and not as 'others' alien to those around them. The Case studies undertaken also reinforce the findings of the reviewed literature that pursuing Education is extremely difficult as a person who is a sexual minority struggles each moment to reinforce his/her gender identity. Usually looking at the documented cases it is observed that individuals belonging to this community are considered to be outcasts most of the time and face the harsh realities of living a life of Struggle, Hardship and Marginalization at every step. This research paper is an attempt to build a case for inclusion of this excluded community in Education, often commonly referred or addressed as Hijras and Kinnars in Northern parts of India in particular.

**KEYWORDS:** Marginalisation, Exclusion, Education, Human Rights, Inclusion.

## BACKGROUND:

This research particularly holds value due to the long pending passage of the Transgender Bill 2019 in the Indian Parliament, recently passed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on one hand and with the new policy on education specially laying emphasis on Inclusion of the Marginalized groups in Education on the other hand. It is thus imperative that implementation of any policy and programme (if instituted in institutions) for Inclusion with the purpose of facilitation of these marginalized groups is examined with respect to its efficacy and effectiveness in the field. Looking at the review of related studies drawn from researches from India and abroad it is amply clear that Trans-gender are largely excluded from Education owing to discrimination, lack of support at institutions, apathy towards their education and above all systemic exclusionary practices by the key stakeholders such as parents and teachers who do not have an open mindset towards making attempts towards inclusion of transgender in the ambit of Education. The pervasive attitude in society at large is that they are the minuscule minority who are neither capable nor deserving enough to be educated with the generally referred to 'normal' students.

## REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES:

Lagos and Schilt (2017) tracked the development of LGBTQ in the United States of America over fifty years from 1960s. They identified two major paradigms, namely gender deviance (1960s–1990s) and a focus on gender difference (1990s–present) while focusing on areas of research that explored the diversity of transgender people's identities and social locations. They also examined transgender people's experiences within institutional and organizational contexts along with the research that uses quantitative approaches to gauge transgender people's identities and experiences. They identified the degree of change that has happened, sociologically, during Obama and Trump's administration.

Another study by Flores et al. (2016) considered a large sample survey of 17,105 adults across 23 countries for their study to find about the behavioral attitudes towards transgender people and transgender rights. They found that in all 23 countries believe that transgender people deserve the right to change their identity documents to be consistent with their gender identity, though a substantial portion believes that some form of regulation from medical professionals, medical interventions, and/or government is necessary.

A path-breaking doctoral study was conducted by Dirks (2011) on policy discourse analysis on transgender people in university campuses. She examined the language used in discourse to discuss transgender people on university campuses. The data for this study consisted of 16 reports issued at four schools from 1992 to 2018. This study employed policy discourse analysis, which is a hybrid methodology that enables the analysis of written documents using feminist, critical and post structural theories in order to identify the subject positions generated through policy discourse. It further provided the necessary thrust with respect to the role of language being of paramount importance to foster an enabling environment for inclusion and in turn facilitated transgender for pursuing education in an environment that respects diversity and accepts differences without any prejudice or bias. The study conclusively found that transgender people are depicted in most of the reports as 'victims', in need of protection by the university. Renn (2010) evaluated the status of LGBTQ research in higher education. The

author argued that despite the fact that colleges and universities are the rich source of much of the critical and postmodern writings about LGBTQ, but still scholarships on LGBTQ and organizations in higher education itself lacked theoretical depth. The author suggested that there are certain areas in which attention to methodological rigor and theoretical advancement are required.

A study conducted by Bekli et al. on transgender status in Coimbatore, using the descriptive research design tried to examine the socio-economic background of transgender community to document the discrimination faced by them, civil rights enjoyed by them and found that this relies on efficacy of transgender associations. Using snow ball sampling technique, the sample comprising of 109 transgender were collected from Coimbatore. They found that majority of them, belonged to low income level and are highly discriminated. Self-esteem of transgender was low and their health care parameters were found to be poor.

Lee (2014) tried to develop a model to estimate the economic cost of stigma, negative attitudes for LGBT community people and the exclusion of LGBT people in social institutions such as education, employment, families and health care in India. The author found that there are clear evidences of stigma and social exclusion against transgender in India. This study also suggested that the existing research on transgender does not allow for a precise estimate of the cost of living of LGBT people.

The very fact that even after the best of efforts in the preliminary review of related literature, there was no significant documented research which provided the necessary impetus shows that it is critical to engage in looking at the nature and extent of exclusion of transgender in Education in India. This engagement through in depth case studies in the examination of exclusion of transgender in Education shall further support the development of capacities of various stakeholders.

## Operational Definitions of Key Terms:

**Exclusion:** The act of intentionally not allowing or enabling access to Education to a Transgender.

**Kinnar/Hijra:** A term used to refer a community of transgender who live together in a abode referred to as Akhada (in Hindi Language)

**Case Study:** A detailed descriptive study of a person/persons (in this research study kinnars are the subject).

**Research Questions:** The present study tried to find answers to the following research questions:

- Q.1 Which are the life circumstances that lead to exclusion of transgender from Education?
- Q.2 How do the transgender sustain themselves in the absence of any education?
- Q.3 What kind of discrimination do the transgender face in their daily lives?

Q.4 How do they deal with the discrimination they face in their lives?

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To study the lives of transgender individuals to know the reasons of their marginalization and exclusion from the ambit of Education.
- To examine the discrimination faced by the transgender individuals.

**Research Design:** The present study is descriptive in nature and used the case study method to collect data from the field. The sample comprised of two transgender women in the age group of 35 to 40 years. The data was collected using open ended interview questions on the lives of the transgender. The data was collected in the form of narratives which were recorded as field notes and have been presented in the same form such that it does not lose its essence. Based on the narratives, findings and educational implications have been deduced and articulated.

#### Narrative Accounts of Unstructured Interviews conducted in the field to document Exclusion, Marginalisation and Discrimination Faced by the Respondents

##### CASE STUDY I:

The first 'Hijra/Kinnar' who was ready to engage with me in a conversation about her life was found after facing a lot of hardship as most were not ready to open up about their lives. Initially the researcher tried to approach the 'Akhadas' (abode of the transgender community known as Kinnars/Hijras in Northern India) which are controlled by 'gurus' (The Head-teachers who control the community of Transgender living under one 'Akhada') but the guru refused to permit their residents to give any interview about their lives although the residents were enthusiastic about engaging in a conversation about their lives. Person A, who identified herself as a woman was elated that someone is ready to converse with her about her hardships in the closed confines of a private car. This happened because the researcher had developed a rapport with her on the traffic intersection over the last five years. We started the conversation about her life and it was observed that it was not easy for her to talk about the difficult journey. She told me that she was born in a small village in Gorakhpur and studied there till class two, then the parents found it difficult to bring this child up and the 'guru' took her away from her home for rest of her life. Upon asking why was she given away by her parents, she added that it is very difficult for the family to accept that the child born to them is different, people in the neighbourhood make it very difficult for the family to live, even when admitted in a school it was very difficult to cope with the teachers looking at you with a different lens often labeling you as deviant. These are the reasons owing to which she was handed over to the Guru in the abode called 'Akhada' where transgender live together as a community. She further added that she has three sisters and two brothers and she often visits them back home. She very proudly told me, much to my surprise, that she has legally adopted two children of her sister and sends money every month to fund their upbringing. Upon knowing this she was asked: what do the children address you as? She smiled and said sometimes they call me 'mummy' and sometimes they call me 'papa'. She then narrated her journey away from home. She elaborated that while she was growing up she often found that life in an 'Akhada' though offers you security and safety, away from the taunts and humiliation ones faces in home and school, but is full of control and slavery as the norms laid down there by the community leaders are too rigid and there is so much hierarchy that those under the tutelage of the 'Guru' are very powerful and one doesn't dare to speak a word against them. She added that politics ruins the entire atmosphere and there is rampant abuse of bodies for sex which makes life a living hell for the lower in the hierarchy especially. While in the Akhada in Delhi she felt abused and caged so after few years she broke free and landed in Mumbai at the age of 16 years where in the interior of the city she often felt very unsafe and told me that it was difficult for her to sustain herself in the city of Mumbai and she came back to Delhi. This time she joined a community of 'Kinnars', who were living together under a different 'guru' and her ordeal once again started wherein irrespective of whether it was her fault or not she was often beaten black and blue. On further probing as to what exactly happened she narrated the incident with tears in her eyes that once when she did not clean the bathroom drain satisfactorily she was hit by a metal flower vase which left her bruised and bleeding. She elaborated that on this day she cried for a number of hours at length and decided that she can no more be a part of any 'Akhada' as at every place her rights as a human being are crushed without even being heard in defense. She then told herself that she would have to be prepared to struggle on the road and find her feet, so that she is able to live as a human being with dignity. She now started the difficult journey of begging at traffic intersections. She then narrated that it was very difficult to stand begging for alms on the street but nonetheless she could finally breathe free. People often gave her money in the hope that her blessings could change their lives. She then narrated a very heart touching episode that changed her life. She added that while she used to be begging for alms on the traffic signal a lady often used to give her small currencies. One fine day she found the lady sitting in her car and crying and upon asking she came to know that the family business has suffered heavy losses. The lady further told her that she has nothing that she can give her from now on. On hearing this A gave a ten rupee note to the lady and asked her to keep it in her purse as a blessing. A met the lady after six months and was told that the business has recovered. From this day onwards the lady and her husband started gifting her in thousands as they felt it was the blessings of A that their business recovered.

She further added that now she lives on her own with her 'guru', whom she found a few years back and is happy and content that at least she has the freedom to live her life with no humiliation and control at home. Upon asking about her life on the street, she told me that for many 'Kinnars' it is very dark, she went on to narrate an incident wherein a group of boys from very affluent backgrounds used to come in a big swanky car and used to pick up and grab a 'kinnar' in their car, take her to the woods, gang rape her and dump her. They were clever enough to carry one separate set of clothes for raping her and then changing their set clothes and burn the clothes in which they raped her. She added that divine justice is that the boy who was the rapist succumbed to Cancer few months back.

Another incident, which she narrated was that a group of heavily drunk boys stopped at the traffic signal and while she started requesting them to give her what they please in terms of money, while she was asking for money her hand accidentally touched one of them, on this the boy started using the most foul language replete with abuses and told her that she better understand what her limits are, where she belongs, else he would set her right. Upon asking her how she reacted to the insult she added that she just ignored him as she understood that there is no use of engaging in any conversation further because he was heavily drunk. She further told me that this is the best strategy to survive as what will we do if we argue our point and tomorrow he brings a big group of boys to set us right, who will save us then. She further narrated that she did feel very bad and could hardly catch any sleep that night. As luck would have it on the following day, the two boys again met her at the same intersection. This time she was careful and kept mum for a while and said, let me bless you. The boy who had misbehaved with her during the previous evening was now sober and told her that she needs to forgive him as he was not in his senses, to which she told him that since he is apologetic and asking for forgiveness, he stands forgiven. Finally, I asked her how has she planned to live her life in few years from now, to which she replied don't worry at all as she has saved enough money for her future. She further added that she has no ill will against anyone and keeps thanking god for giving her the courage and strength to live life, the way she wants to live, no matter the humiliation which she sometimes encounter, as there are people who are supportive and thus we 'kinnars' are able to sustain ourselves. I came back after requesting her to consider an invitation in future to deliver a talk about her trials and tribulations on a formal platform. We hugged and parted ways with a promise to meet again soon.

##### CASE STUDY II:

After literally trying hard to find a Kinnar individual who would be willing to share her/his story with me the researcher found the next case study subject dressed in a bright green salwar kameez, was physically challenged by both hands and was seated on the street pavement with her guru. Both of them had spent a major part of their lives in Agartala, Tripura in the North Eastern part of India in a small village. They had come in search of a better life to Delhi just five years back. She looked very happy on telling me that she has completed her education upto class III and thereafter had no choice but to quit as her family gave her no option of staying put at home. On asking about the reason for the abandonment at such a tender age it was noticed that her eyes swell with tears and she narrated that it is to be understood from the perspective of the family too i.e the family is left with no choice but to give away the child as the society makes it rather impossible for the family to bring up this different child by constantly outcasting them on account of the same. On starting our conversation about how life has been post leaving home, she exchanged a glance with her guru and was given a polite nod (with her eyes blinking in an affirmative) telling her to continue with her narration. The conversation began sitting on the pavement in the service lane of a busy intersection besides her and the guru, while people passed by staring at us from the windows and doors of cars, buses and autos. On noticing the continuously annoying stares Upon asking her that does she face this invasion of space often or is it something that we were facing right then and she narrated the ordeal of both of them quoted as follows: She told me often boys in big swanky cars stop and ask whether they would be ready for sex as with them as it would surely be a different enjoyment for them. This came as a rude shock for me that in the city the so called educated boys hurl the worst kind of abuse and are ready to exploit anyone who is vulnerable as they have money. On probing a little more about her life with these rowdy ones around on the streets she told me that she has driven a number of cars too if the driver and passengers are game in allowing her to drive (as she had a valid driving license to her credit) which made me think that may be on occasions she chooses to be a bait for them as she has no other way to sustain. Upon asking whether she tried for a job, she added that not only has she tried a multiple times but has no hope now as every time she is given the same answer that she does not fit the bill for the job. She further added that she can be such an effective security guard if given a chance but for her being a transgender.

##### FINDINGS:

- The main reason for exclusion of transgender from Education is they being abandoned by their families early in childhood.
- Apathy of the community towards the transgender as if they do not exist is another reason for their exclusion and marginalization.
- The transgender enrolled in school in childhood too dropout owing to discriminatory practices such as labeling and bullying they face from teachers as well as peers.

4. In spite of their best efforts they do not find any job openings where they are welcome.
5. Transgender community is dependent either on their own community leaders for sustaining themselves or they resort to begging for alms on the streets.
6. They face both verbal and sexual abuse on the streets as they are most vulnerable on account of not having any other means of livelihood.

#### EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY:

- Workshops and Community Awareness drives are needed to sensitise people towards being empathetic towards the transgender community.
- Special drives are needed to rope in transgender community into the ambit of Education whether through formal or non formal modes.
- Teachers need to be sensitized towards the concerns of the transgender community such that they do not resort to discriminatory practices leading to drop out of the enrolled transgender students from Education.

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